

OGORO-UGWUOKE: AN EXPLORATIVE RESEARCH COMPOSITION ON IKORODO MUSIC OF NSUKKA

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Abstract

Music is an aspect of creative expression by which scholars try to capture and articulate their ideology, religious and socio - cultural background through composition. In this era of post modernism and post structuralism, composers are bent on thinking in new ways and new perspectives. Arguably, *Ikorodo* traditional music has not been fully explored in both the area of vocal and instrumental composition. *Ogoro-Ugwuoke* is a piano composition that derived its compositional materials from the musical elements and idioms found in *Ikorodo* traditional music of Nsukka people. This article examines the possibilities of using these materials in a post structural compositional domain leveraging on the concept of African pianism as already highlighted in the works of Akin Euba, Joshua Uzoigwe, Christian Onyeji and others. Using recordings from the field work, discussions/interviews, transcription and analysis of traditional music and library reviews, *Ogoro-Ugwuoke* provides both a theoretical and practical platform that aids the study of traditional music which could be adopted for other non-western traditions. It exposes selected musical elements and idioms of *Ikorodo* traditional ensemble to the world of composers. The composition adds to the repertoire of art music and is therefore envisaged to foster creativity in not only students studying composition but art composers who use traditional elements in reconstructing their imaginative ideas in music creativity.

Keywords: *Ogoro-Ugwuoke*, African-Pianism, Research-composition, *Ikorodo* traditional music

Introduction

The contemporary era is an era of exploration when scholars (composers inclusive) are inclined irresistibly towards the novel; towards the unorthodox and unconventional. The movement is against traditional structures, rigid definitions, mental representations, and so on (Straus, 1990). In musical theory, analysis and composition, this *avant-garde* movement has not been moribund. Modern compositional techniques have since emerged such as pandiatonism, polyrhythm, bitonality, minimalism and so on. Post structuralist thought has placed a great emphasis on the disruptions and discontinuities in musical

structuralism or musical essentialism especially in the areas of musical analysis, musical aesthetics and appreciation - a tendency towards developing an intellectual "resistance to totalizing explanations" (Straus, 2009). This movement, albeit, has not been without oppositions. According to Straus (1990),

It is true that analytic studies during the past 30 years have been directed towards the demonstration of organic coherence. It is not true that it need be the case...I often describe the kind of musical coherence that is fraught with unresolvable tensions and is thus decidedly anti - organic in nature...Traditional elements are incorporated and reinterpreted, but not effaced. Rather, the past remains a living, forceful presence (pgs. 184 -85).

Straus (2009) argues that in the works of "new musicologists", traditional analytical categories, such as the dominant/sub dominant harmonies, sonata form, and so on, continue to play essential roles despite the paradigm shift in theoretical/musicological freedom. Analysis remains relevant. "One cannot talk about musical structure without analyzing them, without theoretical categories. Whatever one's ideology then, the question is not whether or not to analyze, but simply how and towards what end" (p.2). In as much as we borrow post - structuralist thinking in other fields like Linguistics and Anthropology, we must remain conscious about the peculiar nature of the musical endeavor and avoid what Agawu calls "conceptual definitions of unrelatedness" (Agawu, 1993: 96). We underscore music's closeness to language, since both have a communicative system. Developing post structuralist thoughts in Linguistics naturally overlap into musicology (Hongur, 2017). Halle (2015) observes that "the most interesting result of this change in the field of music may be the development of a generative theory of tonal music by Lerdahl and Jackendoff. The demise of structuralism can be traced to the rise of generative grammar initiated by Noam Chomsky's work of the early 1950s. The paths of generative linguistics and music theory have since crossed" (p.8).

In this paper, we have chosen to carry out a compositional research experiment on Ikorodo music. Ikorodo is a maiden dance found among Nsukka people of Enugu State, Nigeria "with men usually serving as instrumentalists and young maidens as dancers" (Opara & Agbo, 2022: 499). *Ikorodo* is a piece of musical enigma full of explorative possibilities in poly rhythmic and poly melodic compositional elements. The hocket technique of the horns, the freelance master role of the membrane drum and the intricate artistry behind its dance and lyrics, all present a fecund medium for experimental research employing the tools of modern compositional techniques. We have chosen *Ogoro-Ugwoke*, the hit track of the typical Ikorodo ensemble in Nsukka metropolis for this explorative study for the following reasons: 1. Its hot rhythmic and percussive dispositions and effects. 2. Its bitonality features. 3. The possibilities of exploration inherent in this track. *Ogoro-Ugwoke* is derived from the name given to one of the *Ikorodo* traditional dance tracks. The paper provides an insight into the thought processes of creative ethnomusicology by offering a guide showing how twenty-first century composers can use African musical idioms in their creative works. The traditional idioms of *Ikorodo* traditional ensemble were collected and analyzed through melodic,

rhythmic and harmonic content. The paper examines the bi-tonality which occurs at the horns sections and creatively applied it in the piano composition. *Ogoro-Ugwuoke* is a piano composition that draws its compositional materials and idioms from the *Ikorodo* traditional dance of Nsukka people of Enugu State, Nigeria. It adopted the concept of African-Pianism and Research-composition in realizing the compositional work. The music is in ternary form and this paper presents a panoramic view and an analysis of the piece.

Concept of African-pianism

African pianism describes the approach of composition that combines African and Western elements for the piano (Boamah, 2012). This concept developed over a period of creative search for a new approach to modern African art music composition in general and for the piano in particular, by African art music composers of the later part of 20th century. The concept of African pianism was pioneered by Akin Euba and subsequently endorsed by other African composers. Euba (1989: 151) further states that techniques used in the performance of African instrumental music in general would form a good basis for an African pianistic style. The ingredients of African pianism include (a) thematic repetition, (b) direct borrowings of thematic material (rhythm and tonal) from African traditional sources, and (c) percussive treatment of the piano. The idea of African pianism is to let the piano act like an African instrument. For composers to adopt the African pianistic styles, there is need to have deeper and clearer knowledge of African musical elements. Kofi Agawu (1999) argues that for musicians from Africa to compose for the piano, they need to study very well, rhythm in African music. In Affirmation to Agawu's opinion, Onyeji (2013) argues that composers need to carry out an in-dept ethnomusicological research work on African indigenous music so as to acquire clear understanding of the African compositional idiom, principles, theory and logic that would guide their art composition. Onyeji (2013) endorsed the adaptation of ethnomusicological procedure as a necessary route to the composition of African art music. This article endorses Onyeji's ethnomusicological procedures and tries to leverage on that for further exploits. African composers who intend to compose based on traditional idioms must carry out ethnographic and musicological studies on the traditional music of their choice. They must grasp and keep abreast with the creative theories, principles and practices of the music tradition they intend to explore (Onyeji, 2013). A composition can only be uniquely African when it is rooted in the traditional idioms and in line with African theory and practice. Still on ethnomusicological procedures, Uzoigwe opines: "Most of my works have been influenced by my analytical studies of the ethnography of musical performance in African societies; they therefore, involve the utilization of traditional elements and techniques, as well as a positive assimilation of qualitative and useful foreign ideas and creative methodologies". Re-echoing the views of Euba, the pioneer of African pianism, "an intimate knowledge of the theory and practice of traditional music is a key to the discovery of existing new creative and performance techniques based on African models" (Euba, 1987: 32). Ethnomusicological procedure is the key to understanding the creative norms of African music (Onyeji 2013).

These concepts: African-pianism and the application of ethnomusicological procedure were greatly explored by the writers in the compositional work.

Research-composition

Research-composition is a term used to explain the applications of research materials gotten from the field work for compositional purposes. Here, the motif used in the composition is not just a product of fantasy or imagination, but that gotten from the data from field work. The utilization of musical elements and idioms gotten from the traditional music, exploring the harmony, scale, rhythm and tonal organization in accordance with the African music theory and practice creates the uniqueness and identity which makes it African. In affirmation to that, Onyeji (2013) asserts: for African composers to command worldwide attention, the advocacy is to systematically incorporate uniquely African musical elements in their works and adopt the African compositional theory and Practice.

Ikorodo

Ikorodo is the name given to the *Ikorodo* traditional dance of Nsukka community. It is one of the most popular indigenous music of Nsukka people. Nsukka is a town and Local Government Area in South-East Nigeria of Enugu State. It falls into the zoning system in Nigeria known as Enugu North Senatorial Zone. Nsukka Local Government Area has an area of 1,810km² and a population of 309,633 at the 2006 census. *Ikorodo* is a traditional dance virtually owned by every community in Nsukka. *Ikorodo* is one of the oldest indigenous music of Nsukka community that is still in existence. According to Ikete Onyishi¹, one of the oldest men (Onyishi) of Nguru Nsukka Community who happened to be among the first set of *Ikorodo* group of Odoru Community:

Ikorodo is a maiden dance for the young girls who are not yet married, young girls ranging from the age of 15 years and above who have the ability to twist their waist while dancing to the rhythm of the music. Once any of the girls gets married, she leaves the group. The instrumentalists are usually men who are very skilful in playing musical instruments both the married and unmarried men are allowed to play the *Ikorodo* musical instruments. (Personal Communication, February 15, 2021).

Ikorodo is one of the traditional dances which is performed on special occasions like Ofala festivals, funeral ceremonies, burial ceremonies, chieftaincy ceremonies, to mention but a few. They have also performed on different occasions round the country through invitation.

Methodology

Traditional idioms of *Ikorodo* ensemble were collected and analyzed through melodic, rhythmic and harmonic content. These are conventional methods of analysis that include macro analysis, extensional and intentional analyses. Macro analysis involves transcription of recorded *Ikorodo* traditional music. Details such as musical structure and performance style in solo-response form were all noted. Extensional Analysis describes the music itself such as tempo, timbre, pitch and language, which made it easier for the classification of the *Ikorodo* traditional music, while intentional analysis highlights the

qualities that make up the *Ikorodo* traditional music. This includes melodic and rhythmic pattern of the *Ikorodo* traditional music. These traditional elements were analyzed and used to create a piano piece, *Ogoro-Ugwuoke*.

General findings

Harmonic Principles

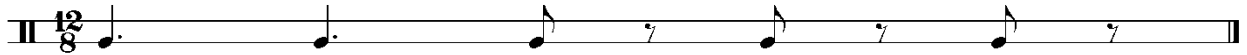
Harmonies in Nigerian traditional music are usually in thirds, fourths, fifths and sixths apart. Instrumental music, we know, borrows much from vocal music; but the instrumental musicians have more harmonic options open to them. The idea of harmony in fourths and fifths is used, but since no vocal inflections are involved, the musicians are free to vary their harmonic lines. The harmonic principles which are employed in the *Ikorodo* instrumental music are seconds, thirds, fourths, fifths and sixths apart.

Melodic Organization

Every melody in Nigerian traditional music is generally controlled either by speech pattern or instrumental constraints. With very few exceptions, these melodies are usually short, repetitive and in unitary, binary or ternary forms with no modulations from one key center. Hocket technique is mostly used in *Ikorodo* music to produce melodies especially at the horn section whereby a horn is capable of producing only three notes, while some horns can produce only two notes and others only one note respectively. The *Oke opu* (horn 1) plays the melody with ornamentations on different notes. *Una* (horn 2) supplies the inner part of the harmony in a relatively hocket style. The *Tuu* (horn 3) lends syncopation to the rhythm and produces just one note at strategic rhythmic moments. *Mgbe* (horn 4) is the bass horn, and so supplies the lowest note of the harmony. (Nwakaego & Umezina, 2015: 130). This technique is prevalent in *Ikorodo* music. The African is certainly conscious of a theory behind his/her musical practice; hence he/she may reject or accept certain tones as belonging to his/her musical style and does not recognize such thing as tonal center.

Rhythmic Principles

Ikorodo traditional music has a mixture of both duple and triple time. Ekwueme (2004) identifies such rhythmic patterns above as typical to the Igbos and calls it the clap pattern, bell pattern or standard pattern. *Ikorodo* music has a rhythmic pattern that is very prominent and peculiar to them.



Instrumentation

African musical instruments are classified into four types namely: idiophones, membranophones, aerophones and chordophones. Our traditional musical instruments are constructed based on the natural resources available in our environment. This reinforces the fact that the traditional-igbo understand that nature is musical. The *Ikorodo* instruments are artistic and it includes wooden-slit (*ekwe*), drums (*igba*), local flute (*Oja*), metal gong (*ogene*), maracas (*Oyo/Osha*), and horns (*Opi*). The musical instrument used for *Ikorodo* music involves series of horns as earlier mentioned: first horn known as *Oke Opu* is for melody and rhythm. Second horn known as *Akpa or una* is for harmony. Third horn known as *tuu* is for leading the vocalist who is the leader. Fourth horn known as *Mgbe* is for bass and balancing the sound of the music. All these are for melody and it helps in curing high blood pressure and makes them happy in any given environment (Ekwerou, 2003). In the primitive stage, the indigenous instruments were made; to find any of these musical instruments today is a major task, since it is not readily available. Many of these musical instruments are now reproduced by the blacksmith in metal form. Figure 1 below is a picture of the instruments used in *Ikorodu* dance:



Performance techniques

In African performance, the audience is actively involved. Participatory observation is what Africans are known for. Through the use of hand clapping, ululations and body movements, Igbos make their music performance quite lively and dramatic (Nzewi, 2003). Our traditional performance is always lively due to the active participations by the audience. *Ikorodo* music has a unique way of dancing which involves waist movement, alternate stepping forward or backward and shaking of the body (Agbo, 2015). Their performance costume is artistically decorated to make their performance unique. *Ikorodo* traditional music is lively, rhythmically challenging, melodically interesting and over all rich.



Fig. 2 above shows a picture of Ikorodo dancers in action.

Scale/Tonal Organization of *Ikorodo* traditional music

The scale produced by the combinations of the four horns used in *Ikorodo* traditional music is pentatonic scale. There is evidence of bi-tonality in the horns section, the horns were moving around keys namely: g minor and b flat minor. The music frequently falls on the sub-mediante.

Musical Except from the piano piece "Ogoro Ugwuoke"
Ogoro Ugwuoke

Ikenna Jonas Eze

Vivace ♩ = 150

Piano

4

7

11

15

19

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The music captured the essence of *Ikorodo* traditional dance music of Nsukka people, for the piano. The piece is structured in ternary form ABA, utilizing the pentatonic scale produced from the polyphonic melodies by the horns. The piano simulates the harmonic and melodic style of the horns, as well the percussive instruments of the *Ikorodo* ensemble. The reference pattern by the wooden block is one of the distinctive features of *Ikorodo* ensemble that makes it unique from other traditional music of Nsukka people. The right hand simulates the polyphonic melodies from the horns. At section A, the first four bars of the piece formed the theme of the composition, which was repeated with variations at bars 5-16. The left hand maintained the reference pattern which is captured from the wooden block instrument of *Ikorodo* ensemble with little variations at bars 6-7, 9-11, 14-15, 17-19, 21-28 respectively. A conversation was established between the right hand (treble clef) and left hand (bass clef) at bars 21-24 in a form of call-and-response style which is one of the distinctive features of African music. There is a repetition of the theme at bars 29-32 which marked the end of section A. The developmental section B started at bar 33 with entirely different rhythmic movement by the left hand while the right hand maintained the reference pattern from bars 34-46. The drum improvisation is captured at bars 37-46. From bars 47-54 is a conversation between the treble and bass clef in a call-and-response style. The B section end at bar 57 with a sign of fermata. There is recapitulation of A section at bar 58 which runs till the end of the piece.

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here is evidence of bi-tonality at the *Ikorodo* horns section which was captured in the composition. The music was moving in two keys namely; g minor and b flat minor respectively. The evidence of these two keys created some sort of atonal sense in the music.

The harmony and texture of the song are conceptually linear but multilinear polyphony that characterizes the traditional music is dominantly used. Harmonic style of 2nd, 4th, 5th and 6th were used in the composition. The scale used for the composition is pentatonic which is derived from the horns instrument.

Conclusion

African pianism has become one of the unique ways by which composers explore the traditional music around us by harnessing the creative features and compositional materials that are embedded in our traditional music. For composers to utilize the traditional musical elements and idioms in their compositional works, there is need to embark on ethnomusicological research-composition. There is need for African composers to have a clear understanding of the theories of African music and its application so as to compose a music which can be authoritatively African in all ramifications. And beyond this, there is even more need today, from a post structuralist mind set, for a freelance reinterpretation of the essence, structure and medium of every musical genre or idiom and to project variant nuances of musicality beyond the traditional context. This allows a musical composition to go beyond its original purpose to serve other multiple unstructured purposes. This is the experimental task which this paper has tried to address, taking a track from an *Ikorodo* ensemble away from its original home, so to speak, and its original structures, to create a new world of entertainment and contemplative appreciation. Post structuralism, like other contemporary movements in music, the wider arts and humanities encourage the visit of many and much more vistas or domain.

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